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News

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Havana Gardens bloom on old Buckingham site

Qdoba, Kohl's mark grand openings
By BRANDON JOHANSSON
The Aurora Sentinel

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AURORA | Finding a parking spot near East Mississippi Avenue and South Havana Street proved to be a challenging task for much of the day Wednesday.

And for the officials who have worked for more than a year to turn the old Buckingham Square Mall site into The Gardens on Havana, the packed lot was a welcome sight.

"It's just exciting," said Gayle Jetchick, executive director of the Havana Business Improvement District, which has worked closely with developers and the city of Aurora to turn the old mall into the 50-acre, \$110-million Gardens project.

Wednesday marked the grand openings of both the Kohl's department store, one of the anchors of the project, and a Qdoba Mexican Grill, the first of what officials say will be a handful of eateries in the shopping district.

The Kohl's store has been open for business since Sunday when officials launched the 88,000-square-foot store with a soft opening, but Wednesday marked the store's grand opening, complete with ribbon cutting.

Jetchick said the crowds of shoppers started gathering at the department store early Wednesday morning.

"At 8 a.m. people could hardly get in the door at Kohl's there were so many people," she said.

And the crowds remained steady throughout much of the day.

"The parking lot out there, I don't think there's an open spot," Jetchick said Wednesday afternoon.

Doug Arnoldi, district manager for Kohl's, said the retail chain has plans to open at least 50 new stores around the country before the end of 2010. The Gardens store was one of 18 set to open this spring.

At Qdoba, a handful of store officials and local business leaders turned out for the restaurant's grand opening.

Victor Lozada, manager of Qdoba, said it felt good to open the store and be a part of the redevelopment project. And, he said, business will only get better at the restaurant as the projects continue and more businesses move in.

"I would say that's going to be very important because we're going to have more traffic around," he said.

Officials with the redevelopment said they hope the project will bring shoppers back to the area who once shopped at the old Buckingham mall and keep their tax revenues in the city.

Jerry and Cathy Burns of Aurora said they used to shop at Buckingham all the time.

On Wednesday, the Aurora couple made their first trip to the Gardens, strolling into Kohl's shortly before noon.

Jerry Burns said the new development reminds him on the redevelopment of the old Stapleton Airport property in Denver.

"I think it's going to be nice," he said.

Cathy Burns said it would be nice to keep shoppers in the area, spending their money locally.

"If they don't shop here, they're going to shop somewhere else," she said.



GARDENS PARTY From right, Victor Lozada, Brendon Fox, Derrick Blackard and Gayle Jetchick listen to a speaker during the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new Qdoba Mexican Grill on March 4 at The Gardens on Havana in Aurora. (Heather A. Longway/The Aurora Sentinel)



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